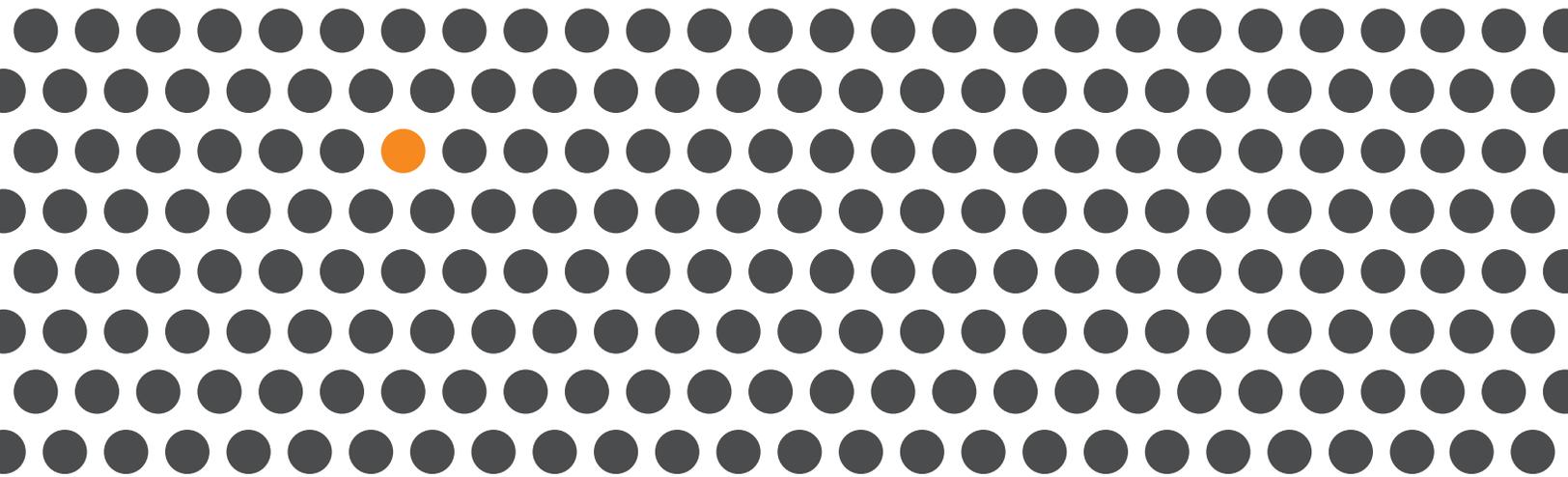


FindLaw®

# THE FUTURE OF SEARCH

PREPARING YOUR LAW FIRM  
FOR VOICE SEARCH



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you need to find trusted answers.



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# SPEAKING OF THE FUTURE

Artificial intelligence is changing everything: the way we shop, how we listen to music and how we run our homes and businesses. That's just for starters. For years now we've seen artificial intelligence at work in the results we get from online searches – results driven by the ways we use our keyboards and touch screens. Today, as AI evolves and becomes even more intelligent, results are more and more driven by how we use our voices. The challenge for law firms is to adapt to this new reality before they're left behind.

## HEAR, HEAR

In the movie *Her*, Theodore, played by Joaquin Phoenix, falls in love with Samantha, the voice of his computer's operating system, played off-screen by Scarlett Johansson. Their relationship begins with this exchange:

Theodore: *Well, you seem like a person, but you're just a voice in a computer.*

Samantha: *I can understand how the limited perspective of an unartificial mind might perceive it that way. You'll get used to it.*

*[Theodore laughs]*

Samantha: *Was that funny?*

Theodore: *Yeah.*

Samantha: *Oh good, I'm funny!*

We're not quite to that level of human-to-machine engagement when it comes to voice-driven artificial intelligence. But with Siri from Apple, Alexa from Amazon, Microsoft's Cortana, and Google Assistant, we're starting to engage with artificial intelligence in completely new ways. (We may even occasionally say "thank you" to Alexa for her answers without thinking about it.) Not only are there voice-activated standalone devices like Amazon Echo and Google Home, but Siri is now built into every iPhone and Mac, and Google Assistant is included on every phone using Android, by far the most popular smartphone operating system in the world.

Whether in your car, in your home, or maybe even talking to your watch, voice search has become commonplace. And it will soon become the default way that consumers search the marketplace for services of all kinds – including yours.

If you feel at all concerned about how legal consumers using a keyboard and screen might find your firm, then you need to be even more aware of how they might be searching for legal services by simply using their voices.

The implications of this switch are significant. It's estimated that voice commands will initiate half of all internet searches within two years, and all evidence indicates it may well happen sooner. Think about the voice searches you make. Maybe it's for directions, maybe it's to find out the distance from St. Louis to Cleveland or maybe even the number of tablespoons in a cup.

**According to comScore, 50% of all online searches will be conducted by voice by 2020.**

## Are Law Firms Next?

As voice search advances, consider some potential scenarios involving the practice of law:

*Tanya is in her kitchen, wrapping her dog's hind leg. The neighbor's terrier broke through their privacy fence again. This time, Tanya's pup caught the business end of her neighbor dog's lack of training. Tanya half-jokingly asks, "Alexa, can I sue my neighbor if his dog bites mine?" Interestingly, Alexa replies, "According to CoughlanMurrayAttorneys.com, maybe. In Tennessee, a dog owner is liable for dog bites under certain circumstances. Would you like me to call this law firm?"*

*Steve rents a third-floor apartment in suburban Omaha. He recently tried to install a new ice maker. Steve isn't exactly a handyman, and now there's a water leak. Honestly, Steve hasn't always seen eye-to-eye with his landlord. He asks his Google Home device, "Can a renter be held liable for damage caused by DIY home improvements?"*

*Another scenario is a simple search for service providers nearby. For instance, "Alexa, find me an attorney who can help me prepare a will." Or, more likely, "Alexa, find an attorney who can help me prepare a will and provide estate planning services within five miles."*

Voice search is not just an interesting trend, and it's certainly not a high-tech fad. Its inexorable path to dominating digital search means it will become more and more a part of how law firms, including yours, market themselves and make themselves visible to those in need of their services. The future of search is voice, and it will be all about what your prospects *hear*.

## Far More Searches, Far Fewer Screens

The first important thing to notice about results from a keyboard search and the results from a voice search is how they differ. A text search will provide you with an almost endless list of search engine results pages (SERPs) through which you can almost endlessly scroll. With voice, the results are often more limited, but also more dynamic and more conversational by design.

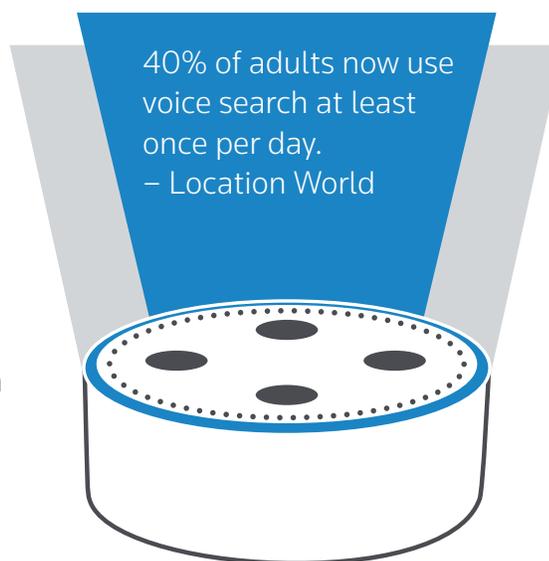
Take a closer look at the contrast between these two user experiences. As noted earlier, traditional online search will usually list tens of thousands of results. In contrast, voice search results almost take the form of recommendations, typically by providing only a single response. Unless you're first in a voice search result, you may as well be invisible. Make that inaudible.

Also notice the increasing ubiquity of voice-driven search devices and services. Looking only at Amazon products reveals at least seven versions of its Alexa-centric Echo devices; Amazon also has opened up the technology for third-party manufacturers to integrate into their products. All of these iterations offer various combinations of utility and features. Add to this list competing devices and the growing number of smart watches and other interactive wearables.

In short, voice search is now available via more and more devices. Not only are these devices ubiquitous among households, but also within households. As *The Economist* put it, "Once households have one, they buy more to spread them throughout their homes (apparently nearly a tenth now live in bathrooms)."<sup>1</sup>

## The Empowering Impact of Voice Search

These devices also address accessibility issues that make traditional search challenging, if not impossible, for many people. It's a new opportunity for the visually impaired, letting them search without a screen. For the tactilely impaired, voice-activated search allows them to avoid the difficulties of tremors, fine-motor targeting, and other challenges of interacting with a keyboard and mouse. In short,



<sup>1</sup> (2017, December 2), Tech giants will probably dominate speakers and headphones. Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com>

voice search is empowering many more people to make use of what most of us take for granted. And that means the consumers who often need a legal advocate the most now have an increasingly useful way of finding one.

## The Integrated Voice-Driven Life

Conversations with artificial intelligence were once portrayed as part of a distant future, like in *The Jetsons* or *Star Trek*. Now that future is here, and it's not limited to a certain socioeconomic stratum. Smartphones are commonplace – iOS and Android phones now have a combined 99.7 percent market share. The Amazon Echo and Google Home both offer low-cost options, and with its integration into mobile phone and compatible home automation devices, voice-driven AI is essentially everywhere in some form.

In fact, the use of mobile phones in searching for legal services already exceeds searches from laptops and desktops, by 51 percent to 30 percent. If your firm's site is optimized for keyboard-driven desktop searches but not for searches on mobile devices, you're already behind the game. And now, if you aren't considering optimizing for voice search, you've got even more catching up to do.

## **VOICE – THE NEXT STEP IN SEARCH TECHNOLOGY**

It's hard to think small when it comes to voice search. The technology represents a convergence of the essential tools of successful digital marketing: search engine optimization, content marketing, local optimization, mobile computing, advertising, and the ever-evolving need to unravel the mysteries of search algorithms.

Voice search, and its increasing prevalence, is significantly altering how people shop, how they learn, what media they discover and how they "operate" their homes. It's changing the way people interact with their cars and everyday appliances. Voice search is becoming a part of how people live their lives. And soon, it will affect how organizations, including law firms, market themselves.

Voice search is a less interruptive technology than traditional search, but it may be far more disruptive over time. For example, with voice search, you don't have to sit at your desktop anymore or look at your phone's screen. You don't have to overcome the vagaries of typos and misspellings. You just turn to an inanimate object and talk to it

like you would to a person. More often than not, that curiously personal object will provide you with a useful answer to your query. You might not choose the first answer it gives you, but thanks to a growing user base, these devices are learning how to deliver better and better results.

As device adoption grows, voice search will become increasingly acceptable as a means to find local services, including attorneys and law firms. Consumers are already learning to trust these devices. The next step for attorneys is to hold up their end of the bargain, so to speak. Give Alexa, Google Assistant and all the others reasons to trust your firm by providing the data and content they're searching for.

### **What Is Trustworthy Content?**

It's complicated. Google Assistant evaluates spoken results against these guidelines, and others:

- Does this answer meet the needs of the user?
- Is the answer long enough to be useful but not excessive?
- Is the answer grammatically correct?
- Is the answer pronounced properly?



## **The Impact of Voice Search on Marketing**

According to eMarketer, about 45 million voice-assisted devices operate in the U.S. That number will rise to 67 million by 2019. Jared Belsky of 360i writes that "every CMO, every vice president of marketing ... is asking about this first and foremost, and they have three questions: What should I do to prepare for when voice is the driver of ecommerce; what content do I have to think about to increase my chances of being the preferred answer with these devices; and third, will my search budget one day migrate to these devices. There are not obvious answers to these questions. But being early to all of this means you get the spoils." As so often the case with technology, it's the early adopters who, along with taking the risk, also reap the rewards.

## **Pay Per Listen?**

Anticipating the impact of voice also means preparing for a future that transcends organic search alone. It's inevitable that industry players will further monetize voice search in some way. At this point, it's hard to determine exactly what that will look (or sound) like. Amazon in particular has been restrictive about overt advertisements on its Alexa devices, but that attitude may change over time as device adoption increases. Right now, the priority of device manufacturers appears to be increasing their user base quickly by creating an experience that is affordable, useful and inoffensive.

## VOICE SEARCH AND LEGAL SERVICES

While the trends relating to voice search seem clear, and in many ways the implications continue emerging, what remains a mystery is their specific impact on legal services and how law firms market themselves. Yet, some reasonable extrapolations can be made.

It's already easy to ask Alexa or Google Assistant to find a lawyer. A legal consumer can even ask for a specialty firm – for example, personal injury – within a certain radius of his or her home. It becomes a little trickier when asking specific legal questions. Try out one of the more advanced scenarios at the start of this paper and, for now, you would be disappointed in the results. Even asking a fact-based question regarding liability or specific state statutes isn't likely to return a useful answer at this point.

However, it's getting answers to those exact types of questions that in the near future will encourage consumers to engage with AI. It is the resulting "conversation" in a voice search that can ultimately lead to them finding a firm. The next question is, will it be your firm, or someone else's?

That answer may depend on the policies behind this technology. While Amazon currently uses a fairly strict advertising policy on Alexa-enabled devices, Google Home owners reported hearing an ad for a film mixed in with their daily news in early 2017. (The reaction was not overwhelmingly positive.)

Despite initial reluctance to overt advertisements on these platforms, it's not hard to imagine a future scenario wherein a combination of Google search history and recent YouTube viewing might indicate that a person is about to start a business. In response, a tech-savvy law firm could, in theory, create an ad regarding the importance of properly filed articles of incorporation. The ad could run between music tracks playing on a potential client's Google Home device with a call to action of, "Ready to talk about your new business? Just say yes, and I'll dial."

## Privacy: The Elephant in the (Virtual) Room

Privacy is a particularly important issue for the legal profession, and voice-activated devices come with their own considerations in this regard. That's something to keep in mind when you consider using a voice-activated device in your office. An Amazon Echo is a listening device after all, albeit a very smart one. And for a variety of reasons, the Echo records your "conversations" with Alexa. Many of those reasons are quite practical – for instance, those recordings help make the device more personalized and useful.

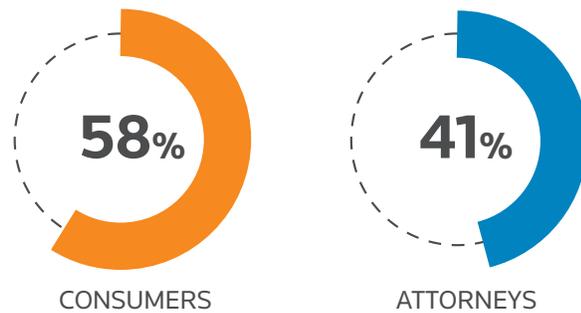
AI devices' capabilities for listening and recording have generated some amusing incidents — and some very serious ones. For instance, in the spring of 2017, Burger King ran a commercial that used the phrase “OK, Google, what is the Whopper Burger?” The commercial triggered numerous Google Home devices within listening distance to start reading aloud from the Whopper’s Wikipedia page. In a less frivolous incident, a prosecutor in a murder case requested recordings from the defendant’s Amazon Echo. Amazon declined the request, but the defendant ultimately gave Amazon permission to release them.<sup>2</sup>

Advertising lawyer Ronald Camhi notes “As in-home, voice-controlled AI technology becomes even more prevalent and evolves in terms of substance – more capable of offering real answers to real questions – marketers will need to be increasingly careful to properly follow FTC disclosure and advertising guidelines.”

Privacy is also important to consumers, of course. The adoption and success of these devices depends heavily on their ability to live up to multiple types of consumer expectations. For one, whether or not consumers trust that their interactions, though recorded, stay private and primarily used to deliver an enhanced interactive experience. On the other hand, consumers need to feel that the results of voice search can be trusted. Are the results accurate in their details – name, address, specialty, and so on? What’s more, do they provide the best answers for the searcher? Just as you must earn the trust of your clients, search results providers must earn their trust as well.

FindLaw has conducted our own research regarding the acceptance of using voice-activated devices to search for legal services. The results bode well for voice-enabled devices. In one survey, we asked respondents if they would be comfortable, now or in the future, using a device like an Amazon Echo or Google Home to search for legal services. Over 58 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they would. FindLaw also surveyed law firms as to whether they would consider marketing their firms through voice-activated digital assistants. The percentage of those who agreed or strongly agreed was 41 percent, versus 25 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Once again, it appears that attorneys may be slightly behind the technology curve when compared with their potential clients.

### COMFORT WITH VOICE SEARCH IN LEGAL MARKETING



Source: 2017 FindLaw.com survey

<sup>2</sup> Dwyer, Colin (2017, November 29), Arkansas Prosecutors Drop Murder Case That Hinged On Evidence From Amazon Echo. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org>

## TALKING THE TALK

With the evidence suggesting that the use of voice search will continue to grow, attorneys need to start considering the actions they should take today that will help their voice search placement now and in anticipation of wider adoption.

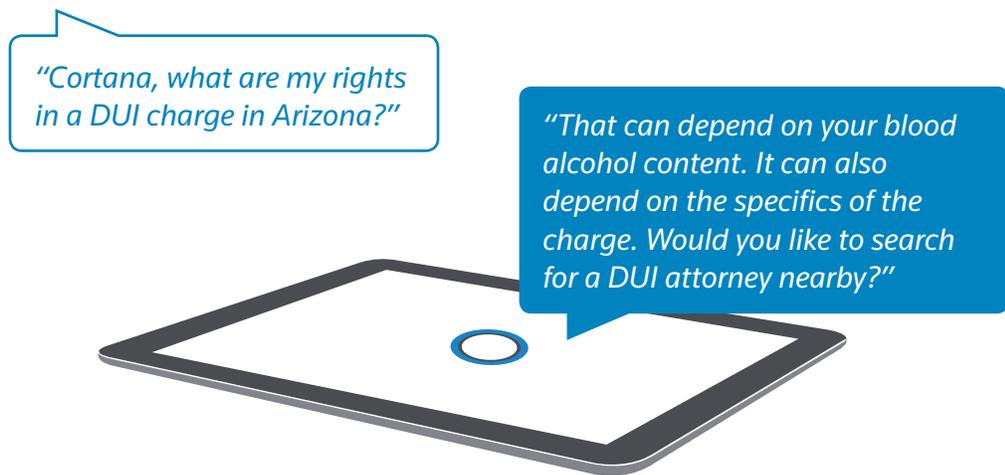
Part of the answer lies in understanding the differences we've discussed between traditional search and voice search – both in how they are conducted and how results are provided. Voice search is a conversation, and because of that, it tends to be longer than a traditional typed-in search. Another distinctive aspect of voice searches is that they tend to focus more on local businesses, products, and services. In light of differences like these, consider taking these practical steps to get ready for the future of search:

- **Because a voice search is a conversation, ensure that your content is created with an approachable tone – a human voice, if you will.**  
That requires more than avoiding unnecessary jargon. It also means thinking about what consumers would actually say when voice-searching for a law firm. This goes beyond so-called “long-tail” searches – that is, where the searcher types groups of keywords or phrases. The “tail” in a voice search is even longer, and you need to anticipate how a real person might ask a real legal question. For example, instead of typing a text search for “intellectual property lawyer in Greater Boston,” a legal consumer might say, “OK Google, are there any I.P. lawyers specializing in software piracy nearby?” As you add content to your website to appeal to voice search technology, think about the entire client acquisition funnel. Consider the different questions prospects might ask at different stages of their legal search.
- **Voice searches are more likely to ask the types of questions that lead to concrete action.**  
So incorporate into your content “question” words that drive a response or action – how, what, where, and so on. Also, use positive descriptive words that are more likely to trigger action, such as best, top, easy and the like. Again, the goal is to align your online presence with the type of natural language used in vocal interactions.
- **Claim your Google My Business listing.**  
To quote Google’s own description of its My Business service, “take charge of what people see when they do a local search for your business. Google My Business gives you the tools to update your listing and engage with your customers from your phone, tablet and computer. All for free.” Beyond

your Google My Business listing, also claim your Bing Places for Business listing. In both cases, pay special attention to these details regarding your firm wherever they appear in your content: location, phone number, email addresses, hours and other pertinent information. The accuracy of this data is critical to smart devices designed to prioritize local, factual information.

- **It's more important than ever to create and maintain quality FAQ pages and content.**

Again, "quality" means forming the questions in a way that a person might actually ask them. It also includes answering them with conversational language. A voice search "conversation" might go something like this:



- **Effectively use structured data markup, or schemas, to enhance your voice search result placement.**  
Schemas provide you, or more accurately your webmaster, with a vocabulary for embedding text into your site's HTML code. (See [schema.org](http://schema.org) for more information.) This text, though invisible to search consumers, provides search engines with more specific information about your firm and its services. This, in turn, makes it easier for the engines to respond more accurately to searches – and, hopefully, for legal consumers to find you.
- **Embrace the risk and reward that come with ratings and reviews.**  
Ask for them and make them available. Thank the positive reviewers, and prudently and respectfully engage the negative reviewers. Consumers searching for "the best rated attorney" will certainly ask to be connected to the "top rated attorney" when given the opportunity. Consumers expect

to see ratings for non-legal service providers, and they also look for them when seeking legal help. Encouraging ratings and reviews can be nerve-racking, but they're also a legitimate (and unavoidable) way to enhance your reputation and your brand. (For more on this topic, see FindLaw's white paper, [You Can't Control Your Firm's Reputation.](#))

While voice search is bringing profound changes to the ways you'll market your firm, it doesn't change the fundamentals of marketing. Your brand exists with or without your efforts to support and build it. You need to be aware of every touchpoint that affects the collective perceptions of the public. After all, that public perception accounts for a large portion of your law firm's brand.

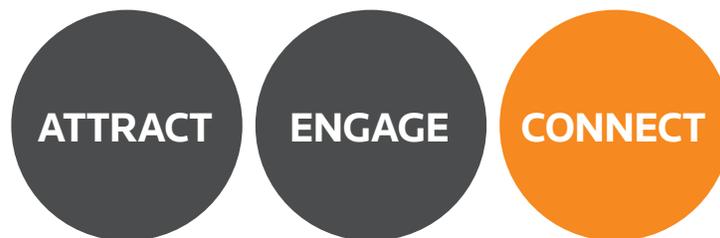
## **YOUR NEXT STEPS**

The emergence and continued growth of voice search has important implications for your firm. The future of law firm marketing will be one in which web searches are audible, longer, more conversational, more specific and more local. The result of these searches will be recommended actions, not menus of possible choices.

The time for attorneys to take action is now. Start preparing your firm for voice search today. That way, when your future prospects ask for legal assistance, your voice will be among the next sounds they hear.

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